

SUBMISSION FROM CORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING BOARD

Introduction

Cork Education and Training Board (CETB) welcomes the opportunity afforded to it, other stakeholders and interested parties, to make a submission to the Minister for Education and Skills Mr Bruton TD and the Department as they commence the process of developing a new Strategy for Education and Skills 2016-2018.

CETB welcomes the Government's Programme for a Partnership Government and its stated aim of advancing a transformation of the education system to support, through a strong economy, fair and compassionate society, a principle which is at the core of Cork Education and Training Boards vision and philosophy.

Since the establishment of the Education and Training Boards in 2013, and previously through the VECs, our sector has played a significant role in changing and enhancing the education landscape, from post primary education to adult and further education. ETBs have taken on many challenges, with the transfer of former FÁS training to the sector in 2014, we have placed considerable emphasis on the development of an integrated Further Education and Training sector that meets the economic and social needs of the regions and communities we serve, with a readiness and willingness to develop and implement a range of diverse education and training options that meet the requirements of learners and employers.

The ETB sector has always been at the forefront in meeting the needs of disadvantaged communities and learners. Our adult basic education and community education programmes provide for learners who may have never had the opportunity to avail of the educational opportunities that are seen as a fundamental right within other sectors of society. Through these programmes, supported by the Back to Education Initiative and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), learners who may never have had the opportunity to progress beyond lower second level education are now provided with a pathway to Further and Higher Education. Our Youthreach centres and Youth services provide education programmes and opportunities for young people who have difficulties in mainstream settings, providing them with the opportunity in many cases not of "second chance" but first time real engagement with education designed with their needs in mind.

CETB provides second level education in 29 post primary schools across its area of remit, catering for over 11,000 students. Many of our schools cater for areas blighted by social and economic disadvantage, supported in some cases by the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative, but in many others, where the pupils enrolment profile does not meet the requirements for DEIS designation, supporting students from within existing (and in recent years) severely depleted and reduced resources. The commitment of our schools, and their successes in catering for the wide range of needs, abilities and aptitudes of our students, is evidenced by the ongoing growth in enrolments, growth which has necessitated a

significant capital building programme to provide additional classroom accommodation and which will require sustainment over the duration of the Department's Plan and beyond.

CETB is one of the largest providers of Further Education and Training in the state, with a well-developed Post Leaving Certificate programme delivered through four standalone PLC colleges and nine PLC units attached to post primary schools. Our PLC programmes provide a vital step on the education pathway for many learners, including recent post primary school graduates, adult learners who have progressed through the adult and community education strands, and learners returning to education for reskilling, retraining, or other reasons. The strengths and versatility of PLC provision as a vital part of the economic and social well-being agenda will require support through an ongoing commitment to putting in place structures and supports that allow it to develop and adapt to meet the changing requirements of the communities served and society at large.

The ETB's training function has played a significant role in meeting the training needs of individuals and industry as we were enveloped by the greatest economic crisis of recent decades. The role played by the Cork Training Centre and the services provided from there should not be underestimated with regards to the contribution made to reducing the numbers of people seeking employment in recent years. The changing economic and business environment as we emerge from the recession requires that training assumes an even more important role, that it become an integral part of the employment model, providing not just for initial, pre-employment training, but ongoing skills development, upskilling and reskilling for workers in employment, in order to ensure that skills are current and match the new and emerging requirements of industry sectors. As training adapts to meet these needs, a flexible responsive model for resourcing and supporting the training function of ETBs will require the support and commitment of the Department and SOLAS.

More recently in the Irish Education ecosystem, ETBs and Cork ETB have taken on the provision of primary education through the delivery of Community National Schools (CNS). As a model of primary education that meets the demand from parents and communities for an alternative to the majority religious owned and operated primary schools that dominate the Irish education landscape. The Community National School model has tremendous capacity to develop with the support of the Department. Our commitment to the CNS model is based on its capacity to deliver a high quality education to children in their community, through a school that is under the patronage of a state organisation, where the school is publicly owned and publicly accountable. It is our belief, based on our own experience and the wider experiences within the ETB sector, that the CNS model is one which will find favour with a significant number of parents if we are afforded the opportunity to expand and enhance the model.

Cork Education and Training Board has, since its formation, recognised and actively participated in the reform agenda set out by Government. Not only has it facilitated the integration of two former VECs into its structure and the assimilation of the former FÁS training function, it has also been part of a wider agenda for change within the education sector, participating in a number of projects designed to share functions and services across all ETBs in order to improve efficiencies and the quality of service for service users, be they learners, employees, employers or the wider public. All this was undertaken at the time when a public

service embargo significantly affected the organisation. As part of its remit in supporting other education providers, CETB has taken on a support role for other schools in the areas of capital building projects and ICT.

All the above is by way of background and context. Cork Education and Training Board welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Minister and the Department and looks forward to meeting the challenges presented across the duration of the strategy. However, if the ETB, and the Department, is to be successful in meeting the ambitions and targets that are determined in the eight policy areas, two key elements must be prioritised:

a) Resourcing-

CETB recognises that as we emerge from the strictures of recent years, that resourcing and the availability of resources to meet the myriad and diverse needs of the education sector in its many guises and forms will be a key priority, while also being (probably) less than that which is desired or required. If CETB is to meet and deliver on its commitments under that strategy a level of resourcing which reflects the real costs of the activities will be required. Many of services have been negatively impacted by the cuts of the past number of years and while many front line delivery elements were relatively protected during this time, the additional support functions attending them were not, as a consequence we have services that are currently struggling to deliver. While it would be possible to detail several areas where additional resourcing is required, it is our intention to highlight only two.

In our view, one of the key areas of resourcing that requires immediate addressing within the strategy is in school management. The middle management structures in schools have been reduced to a bare minimum, and below, with a disproportionate load and level of expectation being placed on School Principals and Deputies. A comprehensive review of in-school management structures to put in place a senior and middle management structure that is fit for purpose in the second decade of this millennium is essential. Allied to this is the requirement to consider, for the first time as a separate, distinct entity, with its own needs and requirements, a middle management and support structure for the Post Leaving Certificate sector.

Secondly, within a system that is designed to cater for such a diverse cross section of society, one cannot ignore the significant implications for the high levels of anxiety and mental and psychological stress affecting so many members of society. Our learner population, from post primary schools, to Youthreach centres, to adult and community education and training, all evidence at least the same percentage of individuals affected as the overall population, and in many cases, considerably higher numbers are affected. Sufficient resources to support an adequate counselling and intervention service across all aspects of the system are urgently required. We welcome the commitment to increase the numbers of National Educational Psychologists (NEP's) to 238, however, as a single measure without additional in-school or centre provision this will not fully address the significant needs in this area. During the lifetime of this plan we would actively encourage

the development of a model or system of counselling in school/centre separate and distinct from the guidance counselling model currently in existence.

b) The ability to be flexible-

Needs and requirements change on a continual basis, and in many areas of its operations CETB is required to meet these changing and varied needs. While recognising that overall structures, guidelines and requirements are there for a purpose and to protect the public interest, a degree of flexibility is required in order to develop and deliver appropriate services and programmes for learners. The Programme identifies the requirement for the Department itself to move more towards policy development and setting, which is welcomed, and provides for the allocation of additional autonomy (within parameters) to Higher Education institutions. CETB would make the case that a similar approach is required for the ETB sector.

We have set out in brief below our views on each of eight areas of priority, i.e.:

1. Prioritising Early Years
2. Tackling Disadvantage
3. Diversity and Choice for Parents
4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools
5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students
6. Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities
7. Special Needs Education
8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future

1. Prioritising Early Years

CETB welcome the main aims or focuses of the Programme in recent years of the Early Years and Primary school sectors, as we recognise that the foundations established in these early years are critical to the child's development, growth and wellbeing as they progress through life. While we fully support all the initiatives identified, CETB in particular would like to commend the commitment to the provision of a second preschool year for all children, in preparation for a start in primary school at age 5. CETB would like to highlight the requirement and demands that this will place on the Early Years sector to deliver a high quality first engagement for these young children, and the necessity for the provision of adequate education and training programmes for practitioners in the early years sector, both pre engagement in the sector and throughout employment. A comprehensive review of yearly year's qualifications and standards for practitioners, and a structured system for programme delivery of appropriate training and education programmes can be supported by the ETB sector, as the largest deliverer of Level 5 and 6 NFQ qualifications.

We welcome the proposed reduction pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants but would highlight the necessity for this to be seen as a first step towards reducing class sizes

throughout primary and secondary education. While the benefits of reduced class sizes have been evidenced in research, the maintenance of reduced class sizes across the education continuum provides better outcomes for all students, and particularly those with additional learning needs.

We would welcome the development a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy at primary level, as the basis for improving a child's opportunities to engage fully with schooling as they progress through the system, and while the proposal to provide additional NEP psychologists to support new intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents is to be welcomed, we believe that the proposed number of additional NEP psychologists will remain wholly inadequate to meet the needs of schools.

2. Tackling Disadvantage

Without an effective School Completion Strategy, resourced and supported appropriately, the raising of the school leaving age to 17 is, in our opinion, unlikely to have any significant impact. While the Leaving Certificate Applied provides an alternative senior cycle option for many students to whom the focus and restrictions of the Traditional Leaving Certificate applies, we would question whether increasing the age by a year without a robust support framework of supports will have any real impact on Early School Leavers. Consideration should be given to developing a junior traineeship type programme, where potential early school leavers over the age of 15 years who have completed their Junior Certificate are focussed on a programme that transitions them into work or further training through the completion of an NFQ Level 4 programme with a significant work placement/work shadowing component.

The commitment to publish an updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, with particular focus on DEIS schools is welcomed, as is the recognition that there are also a significant number students outside of the DEIS structures who would benefit from the type of supports available in designated DEIS schools. We would identify significant deficiencies in current DEIS provision, where DEIS planning is largely a paper exercise, and it needs to be more school based and SMART. We would identify the following obstacles that militate against the achievement of good outcomes for students in DEIS schools:

- **SEN** - the lack of coherence and interconnection up between DEIS and NCSE is failing to provide the appropriate outcomes for students.
- **Health**- physical and mental issues impact significantly on disadvantaged students in particular. Schools require Speech and Language therapy and Occupational Therapy supports and interventions, with programmes designed to strengthen personal and family resilience. Advanced training for teachers in these areas is essential in order to support students on a daily/continual basis.
- **Poor family supports and structures** – In many disadvantaged areas, family supports and effective parenting skills are significantly under-developed. The development of targeted effective parenting programmes, with mentoring programmes

for students, would make a significant impact on this area. The HSCL programme needs to be reviewed and designed to meet the current societal and family circumstances that schools operate in.

- **Poverty** - In many DEIS schools there are significant numbers of students who are hungry, poorly cared for, poorly supervised after school hours and treated like adults once they reach 13. Other agencies, including Social Services, often fail to identify these students and their families, but they are easily recognised by teachers in schools.

We welcome the recognition in the Programme for Government that tackling disadvantage in schools requires a broader package of measures which encompasses all aspects of education which are impacted by disadvantage. While all DEIS schools have cohorts of severely deprived students, there are easily identifiable schools in some of the major cities that have particular concentrations of such children. CETB recommends that, on a pilot basis, approximately one dozen such schools be identified throughout the country for enhanced DEIS supports to examine if a real difference can be made in improving student outcomes in the targeted schools. A lowering of the pupil teacher ratio in these schools would be an example of the type of support that might make a real difference to student outcomes.

The provision of relevant educational programmes, specifically aimed at early leavers and second chance learners is welcomed, as are the statements that these should be made available throughout the year, on a modular basis, and that support will be given to the provision of flexible learning options available; in order to provide individuals with the opportunity to attend courses part time, during evenings, in the summer and at weekends. CETB currently provides a range of options through its Further Education and Training services in this area, and believes that there is significant scope to enhance and develop these offerings. In order to realise this objective, CETB would highlight the need to develop a coherent policy with the Department of Social Protection, amongst others, to ensure that the guidelines and rules pertaining to all such programmes are coherent, and that engagement with such programmes is not disincentivised. Furthermore, arrangements for funding and delivery, including any potential learner fee/contribution, needs to be regularised.

We welcome the recognition that has been given to the potential role of the Defence Forces and would suggest that following the initial pilot scheme, consideration be given to enhancing or expanding this initiative to include other state services and agencies. It is critical with this initiative that it not be seen as a low value option for students from less advantaged communities.

We would suggest that consideration be given to the development of a coordinated Higher Education access programme for disadvantaged communities. Currently a number of (extremely beneficial and positive) initiatives operate between Higher Education institutions and DEIS schools, however, this is very much on an institution to institution basis and a more targeted and coordinated approach or programme would, in our view, be desirable.

3. Diversity and Choice for Parents

Cork Education and Training Board fully supports and endorses the commitment to provide parents with choice and diversity of settings in the school system, that reflect the needs of a modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education, while also safeguarding the right of parents to send their children to schools that offer a distinct religious ethos, should they so wish.

As the Patron (in waiting) of two Community National Schools, CETB recognises the potential of this model for primary education provision to provide parents and communities with a real choice, while at the same time ensuring that these publicly funded schools remain in public (state) ownership and are publicly accountable. CETB is committed to engaging positively with the Department to achieve its aim of having 400 non-denominational and multi-denominational schools by 2030, and will engage both in the context of new, green field schools or where patronage is to be divested by another patron body. Cork ETB respectfully suggests that the system of choosing which body is awarded patronage of green field primary schools be reviewed.

We welcome the intention to have new School Admissions and Excellence legislation drafted and passed by the Oireachtas in time for the 2017-18 academic year, however we would ask that any proposed fundamental changes to the existing draft legislation be presented for consideration by the education partners, including ETBs, prior to the publication of the Bill. CETB is proud of its record on enrolments, as we have generally maintained a non-selective approach within all our schools, only in instances where the number of places is exceeded by the number of applicants are criteria applied, criteria that are open to scrutiny and reflect the needs of the school and the community it serves. We are pleased that such will be the case across all school types, and that non-selective entry will become a standard rather than an aspiration.

We would express some concern about the proposed timeline for the introduction of this legislation and its provisions however, as enrolment for an academic year generally commences in October of the previous year, in this case that will be October 2016.

The proposal to consider the creation of an Ombudsman for Education is an interesting one, and we will await further proposals and information associated with this. ETB's already provide a transparent avenue of appeal for a parent/guardian seeking to make a complaint or appeal the decision by a board of management. If the process can be enhanced by a further avenue of appeal to an Ombudsman then it is to be welcomed.

We will await the findings of the proposed review of the options for standardised testing before commenting further, but fully support the commitment to providing parents with reports on the performance of schools, provided that the reporting mechanism and requirements are clearly

set out for all schools, and that performance in standardised testing and/or state examinations are only one of a range of measurements used to assess the effectiveness or otherwise of schools. We would support an initiative to assess how new or targeted investments are contributing to pupil and school development.

CETB welcomes the proposed introduction of a stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents, and the proposed commencement the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Act.

4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools

CETB welcome the recognition of a need to promote excellence and innovation in our schools, however we find this priority area to be lacking in detail and largely aspirational in content. While we support the idea of allowing schools to be flexible in their approach in order to foster excellence and creativity, and recognise that the measures stated may contribute to the achievement of this, at a time when curricular reform intended to bring about the very essence of what is being proposed here is mired in a quagmire of industrial relations disputes.

Schools are driven by, and slaves to, the curriculum. Developing or introducing a curricular model that is flexible, adaptive and can be shaped to meet the needs of students, parents, employers, Higher Education and society in general, is fundamental to achieving improvements in outcomes for all. However, if schools are going to be able to respond to this challenge, there must be a clearly agreed and accepted framework in place that supports these initiatives, prior to their introduction and with the appropriate supports and resourcing to ensure that they have the opportunity to succeed.

CETB welcomes the proposal to set out funding arrangements for schools on a rolling 3-year basis, thus allowing for detailed and informed forward planning. However, we would have reservations regarding the proposal that school management (and we are taking it that this would be at local school, rather than ETB level) would have the decision making power regarding how these resources would be allocated, specifically with regards to the reference regarding posts of responsibility. Schools require a middle management structure that is “fit for purpose” and which provides a school with the structures to support teaching and learning, in addition to the administrative and managerial functions that must be undertaken. We have seen a significant erosion of the middle management structures in recent years, and the proposed three year strategy should, in the first instance, focus on developing an appropriate middle management structure or framework that reflects the diverse and complex needs of all schools. We are not convinced that a reversion to the (largely suspended) system of Special Duties Teachers and Assistant Principals is the most appropriate model for the future, alternative models need to be considered and agreed nationally. Any model that places a high level of autonomy on an individual school and its senior management to determine could ultimately lead to significant industrial relations issues across the system and might result in the assignment of duties which might not ultimately best meet the needs of schools.

We would welcome the establishment of a Schools Excellence Fund to reward new and innovative approaches that benefit learners and look forward to seeing the details of the scheme. We also welcome the proposal to establish a pool of expert supports to assist school initiatives, promote innovation and enterprise engagement

While we welcome the proposal to introduce new technology that will allow remote learning, thereby providing students with access to a wider range of subjects and high quality education, we believe that the failure to explicitly identify the necessary technological infrastructure and supports required to ensure that this has a good chance of success is a fundamental oversight. While we acknowledge that almost all schools at this point in time have high speed, 100 Mb broadband connections, courtesy of the Schools High Speed Broadband Initiative, the IT infrastructure in many schools is outdated and incapable of supporting the type of remote learning activities referred to. Much of the equipment is out-moded, wireless infrastructure is poor or non-existent in many schools, and we are incapable in most schools of implementing a “bring your own device” approach because of infrastructural deficiencies. In addition, few schools have access to the type of technical support services required to keep their systems operational on a day-to-day basis, and a significant number of staff have training requirements in order for them to exploit IT as a tool for learning in the widest possible sense. We would suggest that a clear plan is articulated for the education system as a whole, setting out the funding availabilities and priorities from the Department over the next three years in order to allow schools plan for this.

We recognise and support the commitment to investing in additional continuous professional development for teachers, appropriate to their area of delivery (primary, post-primary and PLC).

The proposal to provide a preparation course for newly appointed School Principals, prior to them taking up their role, is a positive step forward. However, we would suggest that consideration be given to the development of a preparation programme for aspiring or prospective school managers, which could be undertaken at any point by a suitably qualified/experienced teacher who might be considering applying for Principalship.

CETB believes that ETBs can provide a significant support to the establishment of new “Local Education Clusters” and that these clusters should include all schools within a region, rather than particular type of school.

5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students

CETB recognises the need to provide additional, new programmes, course and subjects that will prepare students for life as citizens of 21st Century Ireland. We further recognise that the core skills of literacy and numeracy are integral to an individual’s ability to engage fully with a wide and varied curriculum at any level. While we support the Department’s statement that “new subjects should be introduced such as the arts, entrepreneurial education, and mental

health awareness... a coding course for the Junior Cycle and introducing ICT/Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject”, we would have to suggest that these aspirations will likely remain aspirational until such time as a focused programme of curriculum reform, from junior to senior cycle is agreed and a detailed implementation plan prepared. Our current experience at Junior Cycle is less than positive, and, even without the current industrial relations issues, is too slow and cumbersome. Fast, flexible models of curricular reform new subject development and implementation coordinated and advised by the NCCA based on recognised good international practice are required if this aim is to be met.

We support the proposal to evaluate transition supports available to young people with a view to promoting initiatives which support young people as they transition from primary to post primary to further/higher education. We welcome the role ascribed to Transition Year, as preparation for students before they make the transition to further/higher education or work. We would suggest that the role of Transition Year be reviewed in respect of young people at risk of becoming early school leavers, and that consideration be given to the development of a junior traineeship model in the fourth Year of post primary education designed to provide those students at risk of dropping out of the education system with a viable alternative that would prepare them for further training or education.

We will await the findings of the Oireachtas Committee on the forthcoming STEM report and its proposals for a National Strategy to develop competence in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

We would suggest that engagement with the ETB sector through ETBI be included as the development of a coherent and implementable plan to identify and address skills gaps, ICT and STEM needs at all levels from 5 to 10 on the NFQ.

6. Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities

Cork Education and Training Board recognises and acknowledges the Department and the Government’s commitment to delivering an extensive school capital investment programme. CETB schools and colleges have benefitted and continue to benefit from this commitment, a commitment which allows CETB to provide the learners attending our schools and colleges with the type and quality of environment which supports fully the activities of learning, growth and development. As a public body, CETB has always recognised its responsibility for ensuring that the maximum possible benefit be derived by the community from the schools located within them. We are committed to working with the Department to explore the additional opportunities set out in this plan.

7. Special Needs Education

Cork Education and Training Board is committed to providing appropriate education opportunities for students of all abilities, including those with special needs, and our schools have been to the forefront in ensuring that these children are catered for in inclusive, caring

settings in their communities. In addition to fully integrated provision, CETB schools provide a significant number of special class settings within its post primary schools, catering for children with mild to moderate learning difficulties and young people on the Autistic spectrum. CETB welcomes the commitments given under the Programme to further provide for children and young people with special needs, and would like to reiterate its support for the intention to introduce legislation to ensure that no school or sector can introduce a barrier to enrolment for a child with special needs. Recognizing the significant financial spend on the provision for special education (over €1.4billion), and the necessity to ensure that all children with special needs are appropriately supported, CETB welcomes the commitment to engage with the National Council for Special Education to determine the adequacy of current provision, and in particular provision for children with Downs Syndrome. We would suggest that adequacy has to be assessed, not only in terms of financial allocation or spending, but also, and more importantly, on the structure and nature of supports and programmes provided in schools for children with special needs.

The development of a more appropriate and extensive model to provide Speech and Language Therapy to school pupils is to be welcomed, and while recognising the importance of targeting initial intervention at Primary school level, a new model to provide ongoing supports at second level is urgently required. Furthermore, while we welcome the commitment to investment in the NEPS service, we are concerned that even with the additional resources identified; the service will be insufficiently resourced to provide ongoing support for schools and children with special needs.

CETB welcomes the commitment to identify ways of progressing sections of the EPSEN Act.

While the focus of the actions and intentions in this section appear to be significantly, if not solely weighted towards provision for children with special needs at primary and post-primary level, CETB would advocate strongly for the inclusion of consideration on how best to provide and support young people and adults across all areas within the education and training sectors. Young adults leaving second level education have extremely limited options in terms of progression to further education and training. A failure to extend consideration of, and resourcing for, special needs provision significantly impacts on a young person's ability to engage and succeed in further education and training. In many instances, the absence of any formal structure or programme of supports that follow on from the continuum of supports available until the end of post primary schooling de-facto exclude any option for engaging with further education and training. While this is a feature for all young people with special needs, it is particularly evident for young adults on the Autistic Spectrum and CETB would ask that consideration be given to developing a coherent policy and strategy for the provision of supports across all further education and training programmes, including Youthreach and Post Leaving Certificate provision.

Within any framework of supports for special needs, the skills and competencies of appropriately trained teaching staff are central to ensuring success. CETB would suggest that, as part of its strategy over the coming three years, the Department considers how specifically

targeted training for existing teachers and new entrants can be further developed and expanded.

8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future

The Education and Training Boards have the capacity to deliver significant outcomes for individuals, communities, employers and the economy through the development and delivery of appropriate, relevant, high quality education and training programmes. Over the past three years, the sector has successfully integrated previously separate education and training provision into a single, unified system designed to meet local and national needs. In order to further develop this sector, the initiatives identified by the Programme are welcomed and supported by CETB, in particular:

- Changing the structures of the Department of Education and Skills towards policy development for quality education and improving outcomes
- Commitment to implementing the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education
- Increasing the range of flexible courses and opportunities available, to provide individuals with opportunities to attend courses part time, during evenings, in the summer and at weekends.
- Increasing the number of apprenticeships and the number of traineeship places

CETB is disappointed that the programme fails to recognise the contribution that the education and training sector can make to addressing skills gaps and its focus on providing financial incentives to third level only to respond to these gaps, we would propose that any model to address skills gaps needs to consider all education and training provision and target the most appropriate level or sector for delivery at levels 4 to 10 on the NFQ. CETB has already built up significant expertise in engagement with industry to identify skills gaps and future provision, and believes that the further education and training sector can make a useful contribution to addressing identified and emerging skills requirements, and that partnership arrangements with employers to support delivery should be supported across all levels.

The absence of a recognised model for capital expenditure in the Further Education and Training sector is regretted, and we would ask the Department, together with SOLAS, in consultation with ETBs, to engage in consultation over the first year of this Programme, to identify how a sustainable model of capital investment may be developed to support the further education and training sector, in order to support the demands and requirements of the sector to meet the demands of this Programme and delivery into the future

CETB would welcome a review of the operation of SUSI in respect to how the learners in full time further education programmes are treated in comparison to higher education participants. In addition, CETB would request that any review encompass the funding model for Post Leaving Certificate provision in order to develop a dedicated, fit for purpose model for the

sector, rather than one largely based on the requirements of post primary education. We would strongly advocate a move away from the “teacher allocation” model of funding which currently operates within the sector to one based on a pay and non-pay budget basis, within which ETBs would have flexibility to adapt and innovate.

Further to such a review, CETB would suggest that consideration be given to developing a new funding and reporting model appropriate to all further education and training programmes, to remove anomalies that exist between existing funding strands, create a more coherent and transparent planning and reporting system, and to ensure equality of treatment for all participants, regardless of the type of programme (PLC, adult and community education, training) that they are engaged on. Engagement between the Department, ETBs and the Department of Social Protection to develop a single, coherent model of treatment and funding for participants on further education and training programmes should be a priority within the first year of this programme.

Cork Education and Training board would suggest that the Department’s approach to new flexibility arrangements for higher education institutions should be extended to the ETB sector, where, within strict budgetary guidelines and transparent and appropriate reporting and accountability structures, the ETB would have the freedom to identify and set their own staffing needs within the further education and training sector. By providing more flexibility for ETBs, the Department would be providing them with the capacity to meet the significant challenges that the sector must respond to. The Department recognises the significant change undergone in the Further, Adult and Community Education sector through the creation of the ETBs from the former VECs and transfer of FÁS training into the new organisations. This change is ongoing, and will continue to be a feature of the sector, driven by the changing and emerging needs of employers, learners and the economy. The capacity of the ETBs to respond effectively and efficiently will require a new model of operation based on flexibility and adaptability. This is highlighted by the implications for the sector emerging from Qualifications and Quality Ireland’s (QQI) publication of its guidelines and requirements for ETBs on Quality Assurance, programme development and validation, and as the ETBs move towards devolved authority under QQI. We would advocate that any new model for the sector must provide for flexibility in delivery and flexibility to support that delivery, with ETBs provided with the autonomy to identify and put in place structures to support both, at centre delivery level and central ETB support level.

CETB welcomes the Department’s commitment to a review of the Further, Adult and Community Education sector by the Oireachtas Committee on Education as an initial step towards developing the sector.

Conclusion

Cork Education and Training Board supports the overall direction and emphasis outlined by the Department as it moves towards the development of its three years plan up to and including 2030. CETB believes that it can play a significant role in supporting the Department to deliver on the intentions outlined, and that it, as a significant state agency in Cork, can provide a focus for the development and support of quality education and training opportunities for young people and adults. We would suggest that the role of CETB and ETBs generally as agents for change and development across the broader education sector, not those areas which are specific to ETBs be further explored.

T. Owens
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